

Bharathi and Shelley: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: This paper focuses the impulse of the Romantic moment that is the freedom of Imagination. In Romantic movement at the end of the 18th Century and from the beginning of the 19th Century was a deliberate and sweeping revolt against the principles of the age of Reason. Among the Romantics of English literature words worth, Coleridge, Scott, Byron Shelley and Keats are the most significant. The history of Tamil literature commences from the sangam period (500 BC to 300 AD) marked by concept of classicism. After the Introduction of the British system of education and printing press, the intellectual dimension was widened and exposure to western literature and culture became prominent opening a new chapter made literary history of India. The poets like saint Ramalinganar, Vedanayagam Pillai and Tamil Siddhar ploughed the ground for the cultivation of fresh form of literature both in form and content, waiting for the arrival of Bharathi and Bharathidasan the two luminaries of the Tamil literary Horizon of the modern period.

Through this comparative study. We can infer the idea that how the English poet Shelley and Tamil poet Bharati are similar in the aspect of imagination and they depict their, individuality and laid stress on a particular aspect.

Keywords: Imagination, Essemplastic power, Modifying power, Romantics, Modiating power.

Introduction

According to Heine, Romanticism indicates the re-awakening of the life of thought of the middle ages. In the study of literature, two schools have existed right from early days. They are the Classical and the Romantic school. Both Classification and Romanticism are opposed to each other. Classicism is rule bound and Romanticism flouts rules and expresses individual talent. The Romantic movement at the end of the 18th century and from the beginning of the 19th century was a deliberate and sweeping revolt against the literary principles of the age of Reason. The three impulses of the Romantic movement are freedom of imagination, passion to nature, and yearning for the past. Among the Romantics of English Literature Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Byron, Shelley and Keats are the most significant. Though these poets have shared some common aspects of Romanticism, each one of them exhibited individuality laid stress on a particular aspect.

In the history of Tamil literature, though the periods of a particular type of literary production have been earmarked, the movement and schools which were prominent in the particular period are yet to be properly identified and powerfully highlighted. However, the general epochs that mark the different kinds of literary genres have been isolated atleast by some schools which have attempted to interpret the history of Tamil literature. Its history commences from the Sangam period (500 B.C to 300 A.D) marked by the concept of classicism. Emphasis on the perfection of earthly existence, aspects of love, heroism, attachment to nature, love of arts and social significance are the paramount themes that occupy the Sangam poetry. The diction, the techniques of expression, the metre the treatment of the subject matter etc are well organized and defined. They are standardized and systematized as evidenced from *Tolkappiyam*, the legislative treatise for the classical Sangam Tamil. The Tamil monarchs, Chera, Chola, Pandya and Pallavas were the dominant rulers patronizing arts, poetry, religion and literature.

Preromantics

After the introduction of the British system of education and printing press, the intellectual dimension was widened and exposure to western literature and culture and culture became prominent opening a new chapter in the literary history of India. The poets like saint Ramalinganar, Vedanayagam Pillai and Tamil Siddhar are the preromantic poets Tamil. Actually these poets ploughed the ground for the cultivation of a fresh form of literature both in form and content, waiting for the arrival of Bharati and Bharthidasan, the two luminaries of the Tamil Literary horizon of the modern period.

Imagination

Among the essential aspects of Romanticism, the concept of imagination has been considered prominent. The great critic C.M.Bowra in his immortal work entitled "The Romantic Imagination" has made an

intensive study on the new concept of imagination that occupies a central place in the formation of romantic literature. To the classical mind poetry is mimetic art, and imitation of the external reality, whereas to the Romantic it is a creative art, an art of creating new heaven and earth. This emphasis on creation compels the romantic to consider imagination as the alpha and omega of poetical composition and a divine power which enables them to look into the heart of things.

Imagination and the British Romantics

Blake's explanations of imagination are highly mystical and charmingly eloquent. To him imagination is the very source of spiritual energy, he cannot but believe that when he exercises it, he in some way partakes the activity. Blake said "The world of imagination is the world of entering. It is the divine bosom into which one shall go after death. Coleridge the greatest of the English Romantics and Critic, has analysed quite completely the Romantic theory of Imagination. Imagination is the creative faculty by which man brings something new into the world, something which was never there before. The creative imagination Coleridge says, is essentially vital. It is mind that creates value in meaning.

Coleridge has differentiated fancy and imagination as "fancy" is an associative process, whereas imagination is a creative one.

Like Coleridge Wordsworth also considers imagination to be a creative faculty and the romantics believe with Wordsworth that imagination is the only faculty which enables one to see into the life and heart of things.

Imagination and Tamil poetics

In Tamil classical poet imagination is not dealt with separately as a vital part of poetical composition. It was "Anivakai Ilakkenam" a later grammatical treatise that speaks elaborately about poetic imagination. The creative imagination came to be considered to be a divine power and basic element of literary composition only after the end of the 19th Century in Indian literature. In a poem entitled "Kavitai", Kavimani Desika Vinayagam Pillai discusses at length the function of creative imagination. Yet, it was Bharati who gave a more systematic and concrete theoretical basis to his other Indian counterparts. In this theory of imagination Bharati shares many similar ideas with Black, Shelley Keats and Coleridge.

Shelley and Imagination

In defence of poets imagination is a principle of synthesis as against reason which is a principle of analysis. Coleridge has called imagination as the agent of the reason. But to Shelley reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to spirit, as the shadow to substance. According to him imagination is 'love drawing to the vast sea of beauty' and as identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person, not our own; an enlarger of the heart and purifier of the will. Shelley obviously makes imagination an aspect of love.

Bharati and imagination

Bharati has not written any separate book like if Shelly to explain his literary theories. The scattered references made about imagination in his poems and prose works help to bring together his ideas about imagination. Bharati's concept of imagination is highly influenced by Sri Aurobindo, Keats and Coleridge and then by Shelly. Bharati accepted both subjective and objective imaginations of Sri Aurobindo. Like the English Romantic poets Bharati also considers imagination to be a divine power. He believes that creative imagination can lift the poet to some divine heights during compositions.

According to Bharati imagination may be the recollection of the past events Bharati's translation "The Town lets pretend" by John Scar under Tamil title "Karpanaiyur" is a perfect example. In its preface he has said that the "imaginary city" is nothing but a recollection of the bliss of the childhood.

The powers of imagination

Romantic poetry speaks about three important powers of imagination namely,

1. The Essemplastic power
2. The modifying power
3. The mediating power

All these powers can be seen at work in the poems of Shelly and Bharati.

The Essemplastic power

The phrase “Essemplastic power” was coined by Coleridge and used by him in the sense of moulding into a unity and unifying. This unifying quality of creative imagination is called by Shelley. “The power of association.” Since imagination discerns “the similitude of things.” Shelley has again called it as “the principle of synthesis.” Through its central unifying force, the imagination of the romantic poet was to embrace every facet of human life shaping and transforming it into a harmonious beautiful entity. In the famous distinction between fancy and imagination Coleridge considers the latter to be the supreme integrating force, a living creative power. Its function is against the lifeless mechanism of fancy which merely resembles fixities.

The Essemplastic power of creative imagination can be seen in the poetical works of Bharati and Shelley in places where they combine different images and bring wonderful aesthetic affects. This act of unifying diverse things and finding a common link in them can be viewed as a typical romantic attitude which can be seen not only in the poetical composition of the romantics but also in their social deals too. This has also compelled them to sing of social quality, national integration and cosmic and spiritual oneness. Plato’s concept of the “world soul” and the advaitic doctrines of India serve as the basis for the growth of such social ideas in the romantic poems of East and West respectively.

The Essemplastic power of imagination can be seen in Shelley’s poems like Ode to Skylark and Bharati’s poems like “Kuyil Pattu” and “Panchali Sapatam”. In the “Ode to the West Wind” and “Skylark” where he blends modern secular images with mythological or classical images such as fierce maenad and the blue Mediterranean sea. “In the triumph of life,” he brings together a number of events and personalities from Socrates to Rousseau in one scene. “The Cenci”, “Rosalind and Helen” etc. unite various places and images belonging to various times.

This essemplastic power has been emphasized by Bharati in his description of the classical epics as,
Mingling together the wine and fire joining
Together air and sky – The ancient
Tamil poets have composed epics of Delicious characters

Here different images like fire, air, sky, etc. are combined together with a symbolical undertone to indicate sweetness, destructive power, life-giving force and elevated thoughts. Apart from images like the above kind, images and events, pertaining to the past, present and future and brought together in a beautiful way in the poem, “Nattu Vanakam” to evoke a sense of nostalgia about the by gone days and to stimulate patriotic sentiments, by combining the names of the various places of India. Bharati brings before our mental faculty an emotional picture about the integrated future India in which each part helps the other for the prosperity and growth of the whole nation.

In “Kuyilpattu” he presents a combination of images pertaining to the sky and the heavenly bodies. In “Panchali Sapatam” he presents a lively parallelism between earthly objects and heavenly things. Thus the red twilight sky serves a streams over flown with melting waters of gold, the golden boats to the twinkling stars.

The modifying power

The phrase “modifying power” was also coined by Coleridge. Imagination is a “modifying power because it is a creative force that not only unifies but also over and above transforms qualitatively to shape a new compound. “This transfiguration was for Coleridge the twelfth chapter of “Biographiliteria”. In the words quoted from Wordsworth it is,

“The vision and faculty divine Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth a light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud”

Like Coleridge, Blake also has an intense belief of in the transforming power of imagination which is the basis of “Divine vision”, Wordsworth has also in his mind, the modifying power of imagination when he speaks about poetry. As a poets duty is to treat things not as they are, but as they appear, not as they exist in themselves, but as they seem to exist to the senses and to the passion. He again describes it as a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect. Shelley and Bharati also have strong faith in the modifying power of imagination.

The outcome of this power of imagination is the emergence of the number of utopias in the romantic writings. Whenever the poet is obsessed with earthy reality he either idealises it or creates another imaginary world of his own by the modifying power of imagination. Whenever Shelley finds that this earth is not a suitable place for him to live in he seeks to live in an idealized world with his sky pork or nightingale or west wind or some classical world as revised by him in his poems. This same tendency can be seen in Bharati. In one of his poems Bharati advises his mind not to live in this earth like a pig which rolls in the mud and compels

it to go heaven and drink the honey from the coolman. "This hatred has compelled Bharati to create idealized imaginary pictures of a happy future world.

Shelley's new world is not the outcome of a nostalgia for the past like the golden age described by the Greek poets and widely accepted in the 18th century, but he does borrow from the two of the most famous accounts of the golden age, Thomsan's Spring and Mitton's Eden. Even though the elements of Utopia are found scattered throughout the poem of Shelley, they find concrete expressions in the lay poems namely the "Revolt of Islam", "Hellas", "Prometheus Unbound" and "Queen Mab". The life principle of his Utopia is love, freedom and symbiotic relationship between man. Like Bharati Shelley wants to bring his Utopia into this earth. When tyranny is defeated this earth appears as a paradise. In the "Revolt of Islam" He describes it as,

.....Ay this is paradise
And not a drum and we are all united"

In "Hallas" the coming of the golden age is announced by the Thorus as,

The world great age begins a new
The golden year's reform

.....

Like Wrecks of a dissolving dream.

"In Prometheus unbind" the classical Promatheus, who is tied to a rock to liberated and this inaugurates a new era. The impact of Christian thought can be seen in the depiction of the golden age in "Queen Mab". In "Queen Mab" he says,

A garden shall arise in loveliness
Surpassing Fabled Eden

The picture of golden age continues as,

A brighter morn awaits the human day
When-every transfer of earth's natural gifts

.....

Look back and shudder at his younger years.

Bharati and the modifying power of imagination

Bharati has in mind the modifying power of imagination when he speaks about the power of poetry as, "Transforming stone into diamond, converting copper in to gold, making the graves as paddy"

In "Kuyil Pattu" he attributes this power of transformation to the sun – when he describes its power as,

"Causing the grass smile, making flower as a thing of wonder making clear the sand and causing the water smile".

In another poem he speaks at length about the modifying power of imagination.

You give life to lifeless matters
Bestow light on dim matters
Astronomy, the fall of mohammed
The skillful service of the small boy – whatever the thing may be
You make all of them as things of beauty
Oh poetry, To daughter of cacti
You endow earthly life with meaning

Whereas Shelley presents theory of imagination through his prose work. Bharati mostly presents them through his poetical compositions. The theoretical aspects of the modifying power of poetic imagination is more clearly expressed by Bharati than his English predecessor Shelley.

Mediating powers

The heroic age respected poets as prophets. It considered the poets as men who connect the real world and the world of celestial beings. It is believed that the divine message and apocalyptic visions may be revealed only through the poets. Consequently, poets are deemed to be the mouth of revelation. These beliefs lingered in the decifinal literates too. The Christian neoplatonists as well as plate believed in the prophetic character of poetry and the divine inspiration of the poets. Their ideals were revived throughout the world in 19th century when the poet once again assumed the role of a prophet. But this prophetic power was linked with creative imagination and the result is the romantic concept of the mediating power which was to serve as a link between the brown universe and the transcendental realm. The entire notion of a mediating power stems from a specifically romantic conception of the imagination as a means of apprehending a superior reality. The belief in

such a mediating power was wide spread and strong among the English romantic poets, who held that the creative imagination is closely connected with peculiar insight into an unseen order behind visible things.

Shelley has this power in mind when he says in a defence of poetry that “To be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful.” Again and again he returns to his central theme, i.e., the value of the mediating powers of the imagination. Clothing it in a variety of elegant formulations, the romantic poets were concerned with the things of the spirit and hoped that through imagination and inspired insight they could both understand them and present them in compelling poetry. It was this search for an unseen world that awoke the inspiration of the romantics and made them poets. To Keats what imagination seizes as beauty must be truth. This implies that Keats also had a strong faith in this mysterious nature of poetic, imagination. The German and the French romantics also accepted this power. When we compare all the romantic poems of the world we can see the German Romantics giving more stress to this power than their English and French counter parts.

As far as Tamil, literature is concerned Bharti’s poem clearly reveals his faith in this power of imagination. All such poems which are formed on this power of imagination or in the form of quest motif and are pure or escape poems. Whenever he finds himself as a fish out of water in this earth he compels his mind to fly away to heaven and to know the heavenly objects. In poems like “Venilavil” and “Cantrikkai” the real world disappears and we see the poet to find the absolute reality. This quest motif is seen in “Veppamaram” and “Nanratam” too. All such poems have on allegorical meaning. This type of poems were introduced in Tamil literature by Bharati.